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SUBJECT: GERMANY'S ONGOING STRUGGLE WITH RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM

REF: A. 08 HAMBURG 004, B. 07 LEIPZIG 020, C. 06 HAMBURG 055, D. 06 HAMBURG 054, E. 06 HAMBURG 046, F. 05 LEIPZIG 018, G. 05 LEIPZIG 019

¶1. (U) This is a Mission-wide message and has been coordinated with Embassy Berlin and Consulates Frankfurt, Munich, Duesseldorf, and Hamburg.

Summary

¶2. (U) Germany has extensive government and civic efforts against right-wing extremism, including legal and constitutional provisions. Right-wing extremists -- also referred to as neo-Nazis -- remain a cause for concern, however, and will require continued attention. Right-wing politically-motivated crime is an ongoing problem with over 17,000 cases reported in **¶2007**. Although in absolute terms right-wing violence is most prevalent in the populous states of North-Rhine Westphalia and Lower Saxony, on a per capita basis the eastern German states exhibit a higher rate of right-wing violence. Importantly, Germany's mainstream political parties have rejected any involvement with right-extremists and no right-wing party is represented in the Bundestag. Three parties have found resonance at the local and state levels, mostly in eastern Germany. Overall, support for right-wing parties remains relatively low, tied primarily to social and economic issues and immigration. Public and private initiatives to fight extremism and foster tolerance receive funding from the German government and the European Union. Mission Germany promotes these goals as well, including through the International Visitors Leadership Program. End Summary.

Right-Extremist Crimes

¶3. (U) Germany's 1949 constitution aims to prevent the formation of Nazi-like parties. Political parties seeking to undermine freedom and democracy may be banned by the Federal Constitutional Court. Right-wing extremist associations which are not registered political parties may be banned by federal and state-level interior ministries. Nazi-related paraphernalia and publications are prohibited; many groups utilize foreign internet service providers to establish websites or publish and print materials outside of Germany. To date, 24 right-extremist groups, including two political parties, have been banned.

¶4. (U) The Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC) also monitors politically motivated right-wing extremist crime: in 2007, 17,607 politically motivated criminal incidents involving right-wing extremists were recorded -- a 3 percent decline from 2006. Of these, 1,054 were acts of violence. For the first half of 2008, right-extremist incidents ranging from vandalism to attacks on foreigners rose slightly from 2007 levels. (Note: Americans in Germany have reported incidents of being assaulted for racial reasons or because they appeared "foreign;" none appears to have been attacked because of being an American citizen. End note). Right-wing crimes account for only a small fraction of total crimes committed in Germany; for example, the Federal Criminal Police Office recorded approximately 495,000 non right-wing extremist criminal offenses

in Berlin alone in 2007.

Right-extremist parties remain state/local phenomena

¶15. (U) There are three main right-extremist parties: The National Democratic Party (NPD), The German People's Union (DVU), and the Republicans (REP). These parties use differentiated strategies to seek public support, often not revealing immediately or directly their basic white-supremacist and German nationalist ideology -- which would defy the constitution and might result in a ban by the Federal Constitutional Court. The DVU and the REP had limited success in state elections in Saxony-Anhalt, Baden-Wuerttemburg, and the state of Berlin. The DVU won 6.1 percent of the vote in Brandenburg's 2004 elections and the REP has not held seats in any state parliaments since 1996. Right-wing extremist parties have consistently poor showings in federal level elections; in 2005, a DVU-REP alliance won only 1.6 percent of the vote.

¶16. (U) The NPD is the largest right-extremist party with a membership of 7,200. It was established in 1964 and has an underlying racist, anti-Semitic, and revisionist ideology. In 2003, the German Government, Bundestag, and Bundesrat sought a Constitutional Court ban of the NPD, arguing the party's goal is to abolish parliamentary democracy and the democratic constitutional state. The case was rejected, however, when it was discovered that part of the NPD's leadership were Federal OPC informants, which according to German law made the evidence inadmissible. The NPD is active in all states but has seats in only two state parliaments: Saxony (9.2 percent result in 2004) and in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (7.3 percent result in 2006). Reinhard Boos, president of Saxony's OPC, predicts the party might enter the state parliament again in 2009, but with fewer seats. In North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW), the NPD has is developing close relationships with the extreme groups Pro NRW and Pro Cologne -- groups that style themselves as "anti-Islamization."

Non-party affiliated right-wing organizations

¶17. (U) Neo-Nazis also group themselves into loosely knit groups called "Free Associations" (FA). There is a wide variety of FA and they do not all conform to the model of combat-booted skinheads. They are well-organized, sometimes violent, and use intimidation to frighten minorities. The FA often try to recruit members by appealing to youth and initially playing down neo-Nazi ideology. It is generally agreed that there are close relations between functionaries of the NPD and members of FA.

Efforts to Fight Right-Wing Extremism

¶18. (U) All levels of government and the mainstream political parties are committed to fighting right-extremism. States and communities cooperate; the states of Brandenburg and Saxony work to counter cross-border cooperation of right-wing extremists more effectively. Between 2001 and 2006, the German government provided 192 million euros for 4500 projects and initiatives implemented on at the state and communal level. NGOs have partnered with federal-level organizations to address this problem. For example, several states support Mobile Counseling Teams (Mobit), which teach people to recognize right-wing extremist structures, music, and symbolism, and encourage voters to support mainstream political parties and steer clear of FA. Some NGOs have found creative ways to tackle the dual problems of unemployment and intolerance by grouping underprivileged youth of different ethnic backgrounds in programs combining diversity awareness and vocational training.

Comment

¶9. (U) Right-extremists have achieved only limited electoral success: only at the state and local level and primarily in eastern German states. They are ostracized by all mainstream parties at all levels. In Saxony's and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania's parliaments, members of mainstream parties jointly rebuke NPD proposals and speeches, which is encouraging. The support for right-wing parties at the local level appears correlated with voter concerns about social programs, unemployment, and immigration. We can expect the NPD and the DVU to campaign on these issues in forthcoming state elections and elections to the European Parliament; in the current economic climate it is possible these parties could enjoy an increase in temporary support. Their limited influence, however, will remain focused on the local level.

¶10. (U) The significant public funding to combat right-wing extremism and the negative press such activities generate illustrates the powerful public and political commitment to combating right-wing extremism and promoting tolerance. Mission Germany's interest in diversity, tolerance, and democratization programs and in efforts against right-wing extremism helps pressure political leaders to confront it. In addition to our public engagement, the Mission created an International Visitors Leadership Program designed specifically for activists and law enforcement officials involved in anti right-wing extremist programs, which will take place in 2009. End Comment.

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